

SHIELD WEEKLY

TRUE DETECTIVE STORIES • STRANGER THAN FICTION

A LION AMONG WOLVES

or Sheridan Keene's Identity

BY ALDEN F. BRADSHAW



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OR,

SHERIDAN KEENE'S IDENTITY.

By ALDEN F. BRADSHAW.

CHAPTER I.

A BOY KIDNAPPED.

There was much excitement and an unusual stir in and about Headquarters building on Tuesday morning. Before ten o'clock, even, the vast machinery of the police department had been set in active operation. Patrolmen had been called in from their various beats. The city and suburbs had been divided into districts for systematic search, and the entire force of police and detectives had been pressed into service.

The activity in and about headquarters was chiefly that of Superintendent Eldridge and Chief Inspector Watts.

The excitement was almost wholly that of Hon. Calvin E. Barton, the multi-millionaire copper magnate, a distinguished social and political figure in Boston society.

Before eight o'clock that morning Mr. Barton had invaded the Headquarters build-

ing in person, and startled police and detectives with the report that his only son, a lad of eight years, had been abducted the previous evening.

The evidence of this astounding report, and the details required to promote an immediate and thorough search for the criminals and the stolen boy, were quickly taken and considered by Superintendent Eldridge and the chief inspector; and, as stated above, before ten o'clock that Tuesday morning the entire police force of the city and suburbs was in active search for any evidence which might reveal the hiding-place of the daring abductors, or the direction they had possibly taken in flight.

These active measures having with celerity been taken, Chief Inspector Watts immediately requested Mr. Barton to accompany him into his private office.

The distressed and anxious father of the

stolen boy had persistently remained at headquarters, that he might feel positively assured that every possible step to effect the recovery of the lad was immediately taken, and no expense spared to that end.

Though his career had been one of pronounced success, Barton was still a man on the sunny side of forty, and a typical American gentleman. He was most generally known for his sterling political sentiments, his generous contributions to charitable and educational institutions, and his lavish expenditures in private life. His residence was one of the finest in the city, and his home, his beautiful wife, and two lovely children, were well known to be his greatest joys.

In this hour of great anxiety, when one of these darlings had been outrageously taken from him, Calvin Barton still bore himself with habitual manliness, and with none of that undignified display which might have characterized a less genuine and comprehensive man.

"I wish to talk with you alone for a few moments," Chief Watts explained, when he invited Barton down to his private office. "All is being done that can be immediately done, Mr. Barton; but you are doubtless aware that the detective service is operated under the surface, and with methods of its own. I wish to question you only briefly."

"I am quite at your disposal, Chief Watts," Barton answered, raising his anxious eyes to the chief inspector's kindly face. "Command me in any way, and spare no expense."

"Come down this way, please."

Chief Watts led him down the side stairs, and thence through the general clerk's office in the Bureau of Criminal Investigation. He paused only for a moment at the clerk's desk, to ask:

"Has Inspector Keene reported this morning concerning the Harrigan matter?"

"No, chief, he has not," was the reply. "I have not seen Keene about here this morning."

"If he comes in, send him into my office at once. I think he is making a round of the pawnshops."

"Perhaps I can locate him, chief, if you think it necessary."

"No, no, it will not matter," said Chief

Watts, shaking his head. "Only, if he comes in, send him to me."

But the morning passed, and the chief's interview with Calvin Barton terminated, but Detective Sheridan Keene did not put in an appearance.

"Take a chair, Mr. Barton," said Chief Watts, as he closed the office door. "While the information you have given us relative to your son's absence indicates that he has been kidnapped, yet I desire to fix rather more accurately some of the details, for purposes of my own. I think my object may best be attained by asking you a few questions bearing directly upon what I want to know, and I will have my stenographer take down your answers for later consideration. If the lad is not speedily located and recovered, I will assign some of my detectives on a special line of investigation."

"Indeed, I wish that you would do so," said Barton, taking the chair indicated.

"It shall be done with proper celerity, I assure you," bowed the chief, taking his customary seat at his desk. "Sit here, John, and note Mr. Barton's answers. First give me the street and number of your residence, Mr. Barton."

"Number — Fairfield street," was the immediate reply.

"How long have you lived there?"

"About four years."

"Now your son's age, please?"

"He will be eight next month."

"And his name?"

"Franklin A. Barton. We call him Linnie, from the last syllable of his given name."

"Now please describe him."

"He is about the usual size of a boy of eight years," said Mr. Barton, in tones that trembled with some emotion while referring so directly to the lost child. "His complexion is light, his eyes blue, his features quite round and healthful, and his hair almost golden and worn quite long. He——"

"That will be sufficient," interposed the chief. "Now state how he was dressed on leaving home last evening."

"He wore what is called a knickerbocker suit, of dark plaid woolen, with a cap to match. He had on black stockings and laced shoes."

"Black or tan?"

"They were black."

"He is not an only child, is he?"

"I have one other, a daughter two years younger."

"Did the boy have any money or jewelry on his person?"

"No money of consequence, chief," replied Mr. Barton. "He wore, however, a small but quite valuable watch and chain, one calculated for the use of a young boy. It has his name engraved inside the case."

"Was this attached to a vest, or to his coat?" asked Chief Watts. "I have seen young boys wearing a chain outside their coat, with their watch in an upper breast pocket."

"That was the case with my son, sir."

"I asked only to learn whether he displayed anything that might have led his abductors to think his parents wealthy, and to have kidnapped him upon impulse, or whether the deed was more probably one deliberately planned and executed. It is not very material, however. The principal thing is to recover the boy. You said, I think, it was about seven o'clock when he left home."

"Within a few minutes, one way or the other," bowed Mr. Barton. "We had just come from dinner, and it was growing dark out of doors. I had a small package which I wished to send to an associate in business, who lives on Commonwealth avenue, not more than ten minutes' walk from my own residence. As Linnie had expressed a wish to go out a while, I told him he might deliver the package, if he would come immediately home after having done so. He replied that he would, and I let him go."

"To whom was he to carry the package, Mr. Barton?"

"To Mr. Joseph Hilton, the attorney."

"Was the package delivered to Mr. Hilton?"

"Yes, about half-past seven. My son evidently loitered somewhat on the way, boy-like."

"Did the lad enter Hilton's house?"

"No, he did not. When he did not return at half-past eight, I went round to Hilton's to make inquiries. The latter said that Linnie had been there and gone, but he could

not tell which direction the boy had taken, for he returned at once to his library after receiving the package and did not notice the child's movements."

"Has the boy been accustomed to remaining out evenings?"

"Not after dark, Chief Watts, nor has he any of the proclivities of a truant. He is always very obedient. Still," added Barton, sadly, "I know how easily children may be led away by others, particularly if anything attracts them; and I felt even until midnight that he would safely return. At that hour I decided to send a notice to the precinct station and ask the help of the police. As you are already informed, their efforts to trace the boy were made in vain."

"Do you know of just what their efforts consisted, Mr. Barton?"

"I am told that they followed up several clues. They also made visits to the several emergency hospitals, in the possibility that some accident had befallen my son. All of his playmates, moreover, have been questioned. It is all of no avail, however," said Mr. Barton, with a sigh.

"How about your servants, Mr. Barton?" asked Chief Watts. "Do you consider them trustworthy?"

"I certainly do," was the reply. "My boy is much beloved by all in the house. I do not believe one of my servants would have conspired to any such outrage."

"Have most of them been long in your employ?"

"All of them, Chief Watts."

"Have you ever seen anything which, now that this abduction has taken place, might lead you to think it had previously been contemplated?"

"Of what nature, Chief Watts? I don't quite understand your question."

"I mean, for example, have you seen any person loitering suspiciously near your house, or a carriage or vehicle of any kind standing in the neighborhood, as if this project was already matured, and the opportunity awaited to execute it?"

"No, sir, nothing of the kind," replied Mr. Barton, shaking his head.

Chief Watts sat silent for several minutes, his brow bent in thought.

"I now am going to ask you a rather more personal question," he at length said, raising his gaze to Barton's grave face. "Is there any circumstance in your family history which might have occasioned a feeling of enmity against you? In other words, do you know of any person, man or woman, who might have done this in a spirit of bitterness, or out of revenge?"

The Hon. Calvin R. Barton hesitated for a moment, and then decided to reply:

"There is, Chief Watts, a rather unsavory bit of history in our family," he said, slowly, "and I would much prefer that it should be given no publicity, if it possibly can be avoided."

"It will be given no publicity whatever," Chief Watts gravely rejoined. "I wish only to learn if there is any person who might have stolen your child with the motives suggested."

Then, observing Barton's half-doubtful glance in the direction of the stenographer, the chief quickly added:

"It will not be necessary to take any more notes, John, as those cover the desired ground. Transcribe them for me at once, please."

As the clerk rose and left the room, Barton flashed an appreciative glance at Chief Watts, and said:

"Thanks for your consideration, sir. I will now state the precise facts."

"There was no need of putting them on paper," observed Chief Watts, with a smile.

"The facts are these," said Mr. Barton.

"Both of my parents are now deceased. My father was twice married. By his first wife he had one son. He was named David Barton. Two years after David's birth, his mother deserted my father and went West with another man. As a matter of truth plainly stated, Chief Watts, she was a woman of weak character and dissolute propensities, a fact which my father discovered too late and to his sorrow. He secured a divorce three months after her departure, and never saw her again."

"Do you know if she is still alive, Mr. Barton?"

"I do not. None of our family, except David, perhaps, ever heard from her after she left Boston."

"Where is David Barton, the son?" Chief Watts inquired.

"David, or Dave, as I always called him, remained with my father and grew up at home. But he took his mother's character, not that of his father. Before he was twenty, he was known as a vicious and dissolute fellow. Despite all attempts to reclaim him, he went from bad to worse as he grew older, until his father, who never had forgotten the mother's sin, disowned him entirely and turned him from home. The last I knew of him, he was in Portland, Oregon, a rake and a gambler."

"How long ago was that, Mr. Barton?"

"I have not heard from him for ten years."

"Your mother was Mr. Barton's second wife, then."

"Yes, sir. I was their only child, and inherited the entire estate, my mother dying before my father."

"Then Dave Barton is your step-brother," Chief Watts thoughtfully observed. "Did you maintain any correspondence with him after he went West?"

"I never heard from him directly from the hour my father disowned him. Dave never liked me. He was naturally envious, and was viciously jealous of the affection our father bestowed upon me. His mother's character was incorporated in him, root and branch, and he knew it, and knew our father felt but little love for him. In a nutshell, that is the whole story, Chief Watts, divested of its dark and disgraceful colors!"

Chief Watts suddenly swung round in his chair, and asked quickly:

"What was the approximate value of the estate left by your father, Mr. Barton?"

"About one hundred thousand dollars."

"Half of which, under ordinary conditions, would have come to your step-brother, instead of to you."

"Naturally, sir."

"Let me again see the letter you received this morning."

Mr. Barton hastened to produce from his breast pocket a letter he had received by the first morning mail. A *fac-simile* of the crudely-printed scrawl is appended. It was in ink, and evidently had been printed with a view to preventing the establishment of the

author's identity by his handwriting, should he subsequently suffer arrest.

BOSTON TUES. NITE.

CALVIN E. BARTON.

YOUR SON HAS BEEN STOLE. HE WILL BE FED AN KEPT ALL RIGHT. WE WILL RETURN HIM SAFE FOR \$50,000 (FIFTY THOUSAND DOLLARS) AND NO QUESTIONS ASKED. PARTICULARS LATER; DONT TRY TO FIND US FOR IT WONT DO NO GOOD. WE MEAN BIZNESS! NO MONEY NO BOY!

JIM.

Chief Watts read, with knit brow and frowning eyes, this villainous communication.

"This scoundrel demands, as a ransom for your son, the sum of fifty thousand dollars, Mr. Barton!" he exclaimed, shortly.

"Yes—an outrage! Yet I would rather give——"

"Give nothing!" cried Chief Watts, forcibly. "Don't you observe that the amount demanded is precisely half of your dead father's estate. Barton, it is a hundred to one the abductor of your son is your step-brother."

Barton rose to his feet in great excitement.

"You are right; you are right, Chief Watts!" he cried. "It is Dave's doings. This abduction is one of his infamous designs. When he turned his face from our father's door, he threatened that he would yet break even with me. I was a fool not to have made as shrewd a deduction as——"

"Hush, hush, compose yourself!"

"But Dave Barton is without heart or soul!" cried Mr. Barton, with eyes burning painfully and his features drawn and white. "He would show no mercy to me or mine, despite our kinship. Had I not better advertise that I will pay the ransom?"

"By no means!" forcibly advised Chief Watts, abruptly rising. "Do nothing at present, Mr. Barton."

"But my son's life is more to me than thrice the sum demanded!" cried Barton, with tearful eyes. "My poor wife is almost distracted, as well as myself."

"I do not think your boy's life is in any immediate danger," Chief Watts earnestly argued. "Be calm yourself, and give your wife

all of the encouragement you can. Meantime, leave this matter to me. I will exert every effort to recover the boy alive and well. For a few days, at least, be guided by me."

"Will you keep me constantly informed?"

"Surely," bowed the chief. "Have you a telephone in your house?"

"Yes."

"I will note the number, and advise you of any promising discoveries. Meantime, rigidly avoid one thing."

"You have only to name it."

"Do not disclose to any person, not even to your wife, that a suspicion exists that your step-brother, Dave Barton, is the criminal guilty of this outrage. If Dave Barton himself knows that he is suspected, the threatening features of the situation will be seriously accentuated. If he does not learn of it——"

The chief, who rarely makes a vain boast, caught back his words; but Barton impatiently demanded:

"If he does not—what then?"

Chief Watts thus besought, ended his speech.

"I will have manacles on his wrists before he is ten days older!" he sternly cried, with his clenched hand raised in forceful emphasis.

CHAPTER II.

KEENE MAKES A BRILLIANT MOVE.

The Harrigan matter, which Chief Watts had mentioned as engaging the time and attention of Sheridan Keene, was one of stolen property, which was suspected to have been pawned, and a list of which the detective carried in his vest pocket as he made his round of calls at the pawn-shops, and interviewed some of the suspected "fences."

In appearance that Tuesday morning, Detective Keene was a little off his usual neatness. An outing the previous afternoon and night had been enjoyed aboard the yacht *Mollie O.*, with Colonel Mack and a "gander party," and the sloop did not make her moorings till near daybreak.

Keene had been invited to remain aboard until after breakfast. Hence, when he came up-town and began his tour of investigation, he was clad in a cap, a blue reefer and a dark

woolen shirt, instead of his usual make-up of clean linen and a fashionable fall suit. He did not dream, when he decided that it was not worth while to go home to make a change, to what strange advantages and startling incidents this rough garb was destined to give rise.

As he came down Tremont street out of Hollis, not far from half-past nine, he encountered one of his brother inspectors, who had just come from headquarters.

"Wait a moment, Keene!" the other exclaimed. "There's a case on of which you probably are ignorant, and I guess I had better inform you."

"What case is that, Andrew?" Keene halted and asked.

"A boy kidnapped," was the reply. "Watts and Eldridge are working all the officers to secure evidence and locate the lad."

"What are the particulars?"

The inspector rattled them off with glib brevity.

"Boy eight years old, light complexion, blue eyes and yellow hair, worn long. Dressed in knickerbocker suit, black stockings and laced shoes. Wore a small watch and chain, with name in case. Name Franklin Barton, son of Calvin Barton, copper magnate. Kidnapped in Back-Bay district some time last evening. Chief d—d anxious to fix on the identity of abductors. Good-day!"

Keene laughed and nodded.

"I will keep an eye out," he replied, as the two officers parted.

Detective Keene did not discontinue his work upon the Harrigan matter, however, but walked on down Tremont street, carrying both cases in mind. He dropped into three loan-offices in that neighborhood, in his vain quest in the Harrigan case; and was approaching a fourth, when the movements of a man on the opposite side of the street drew his attention.

The stranger was a tolerably well-clad young man, in a faded top-coat and a brown derby hat. In his actions there was something which Sheridan Keene instinctively felt was suspicious. He appeared as if anxious to evade some person, without betraying that he was so engaged, but Keene could not locate the second party. He followed the stranger

for a block, however, when the fellow slipped around a corner and vanished.

Not more than ten minutes later, Sheridan Keene turned into Pleasant street, and presently approached a shop in one of the old and weather-beaten wooden buildings in that locality. Above a narrow door, which gave ingress between two dirty and begrimed windows, were fixed three wooden balls, which glittered faintly in spots when the sunshine was on them, showing that they once had resembled balls of gold, an artifice long since exposed by wind and weather. There also was above the door a narrow black sign, bearing in faded blue letters the words: "I. Rosnosky. Pawnbroker."

Although Mr. Isaac Rosnosky had thus far evaded police detection, or at all events the troubles and expenses of arrest and conviction, he long had been suspected of being one of the most artful "fences" for the receipt and disposal of stolen property.

The shop was a dingy little place, and Rosnosky was an old and dirty little man, of Hebraic blood. As it happened, however, Sheridan Keene never before had had occasion to visit the place, and his features were unknown to the Jew.

As he was approaching the shop, which was near a corner, Keene thought he suddenly caught sight of the faded top-coat and the brown Derby hat, as if their owner had slipped hurriedly into the place. He quickened his pace, and also entered.

As he suspected, the fellow he earlier had noticed had entered the shop before him, and already was at one of the narrow counters, attempting to borrow money upon an article of which the aged Jew, behind the counter, was making a critical examination.

At a glance, Keene saw that the collateral offered was a small gold watch and chain, evidently one that might have belonged to a young boy.

Under the circumstances, which might have led to some hasty and decisive action on the part of a less clever officer, Sheridan Keene made one of his most brilliant moves.

He swaggered into the shop, looking more like a rough than the fellow at the counter, and drew from his pocket his pearl-

handled clasp knife, as if he had entered for the purpose of pawning it.

At the same moment, the fellow in the top-coat apprehensively turned and looked at him. He seemed reassured, on observing Keene and his movements; but with a quick start he then noticed, over the detective's shoulder and through the dingy window, something outside that evidently greatly alarmed him.

The something was a burly patrolman of the city police, who was approaching down the opposite side of the street, evidently on the watch or in search for some one.

The fellow swung quickly round to the counter, as if about to reclaim the watch and attempt to make his escape; but the aged Jew had vanished into a small back room to subject the gold to a test.

For an instant the stranger faltered, turning very pale; then Sheridan Keene seized upon the chance which the opportunity offered. He sprang to the stranger's side, with a friendly look in his dark eyes, and whispered quickly, with a shrewd display of that ready willingness with which the flash fraternity at times comes to one another's aid when an emergency arises:

"What's wrong, cully?"

A gleam like that of quickened hope rose in the fellow's eyes. He was about Keene's age and build, with smooth features, also; but a decidedly more desperate and repulsive cast of countenance.

"I am cornered like a rat!" he exclaimed, under his breath, and grasping like a drowning man at the aid Keene appeared ready to extend.

"How so?" demanded the detective.

"The cop out yonder!" was the hurried reply. "I though I had shook him."

"What's the lay?"

"Case of lifting a watch."

"When and where?"

"Last night, on Beacon street."

"Does the bluebottle know your face?"

"I guess not, but my clothes——"

Keene flashed a quick glance toward the street, then turned and caught the speaker by the shoulder.

"Come out of your coat and get into mine," he whispered, hurriedly. "Give me

your hat also. I will fool the d——d bluebottle for you. I will swear I found the swag. I can prove an alibi, and they will have to let me go. Quick, now, and get behind those rags on the pegs!"

The thief instantly grasped the idea, and came out of his coat like a flash, and went into that of Sheridan Keene. The entire change was effected in a moment, and while the detective was hurriedly explaining the ruse.

Then the stranger caught Keene by the hand, and whispered hurriedly, with much more genuine gratitude than elegance:

"So help me God, I will not forget this! My name is Bill Varney. I will see you out of the scrape, if I hang for it! I'll be about, or one o' my pals, when you are run into court!"

"Good!" muttered Keene, forcibly. "Quick—get under cover!"

Varney darted to the miscellaneous collection of coats, cloaks and heavy garments, which hung suspended from pegs in the rear of the shop, and in a moment was effectively concealed behind them. The entire episode had required less than a minute, and the Jew was just returning.

As he came quite feebly back of the long counter, with his bleared eyes still studying the jewelry in his soiled and tremulous hand, Keene turned up the collar of the faded coat he had put on, and pulled the brown derby well over his brow.

"Well, what d'ye say?" he demanded, leaning over the counter, with his features drawn and distorted into an expression that quite turned his attractive face into that of a genuine ruffian. "Do I get the loan on it, or don't I? It is all on the dead level, old man, my word for it."

The Jew looked up, and showed some surprise on seeing only one customer where he remembered having left two; but his watery eyes had seen by far their best days, and he failed to notice that Keene was not the man who had tendered the watch for a loan.

"Where did the other party go who was here?" he demanded, suspiciously, instead of replying to Keene's question.

"He went out!" cried the detective, with

an angry growl. "D'ye think he'd hang around here all day, waiting for a shambling old fossil like you? Gimme the watch, if you don't want to lend on it. What d'ye take me for? Ain't you up against the real thing?"

With which display of anger and resentment, Keene snatched the watch and chain from the Jew's hand, and glared at him across the counter like a man outrageously abused.

"For goodness gracious, mine friend!" exclaimed Rosnosky, throwing up his hands. "Vat's the matter?"

"Matter enough," angrily answered Keene, casting a quick glance at the open case of the watch. "Matter enough, d'ye see? You act as if you thought I'd lifted the thing, or cracked some crib to get it. If you don't want to lend me on it, say so and I'll——"

But then came the interruption for which Sheridan Keene had waited. The door of the shop was abruptly opened, and the burly figure of the officer whom Varney had feared came over the threshold.

"Oh, mine Gott!" cried the Jew, quickly addressing Keene, in accents of righteous protest. "I wouldn't lend on it! I wouldn't even think of it! If it vas all right——"

But Sheridan Keene, with a still uglier distortion of his features, had hurriedly concealed the watch and was making for the door.

"Hold up, my man, I want you!" cried the officer, seizing Keene by the shoulder.

Sheridan Keene immediately saw that he was not recognized.

"What d'ye want o' me?" he cried, striving to break the officer's hold.

"None of that, now!" was the threatening rejoinder, and the patrolman snatched out his club. "You do what I tell you, or you'll see stars, do you hear? What are you trying to shove up?"

"None o' your business! I have a right——"

"Let me see what you have?" commanded the officer, forcibly.

"No, I'll not! I——"

"Oh, you'll not! I'll see if you'll not!"

An immediate struggle ensued, which

Sheridan Keene was purposely provoking; but within a minute the rugged policeman had thrown Keene into the chair, and dragged the watch from his pocket.

"Where did you get this, my man?" he demanded, sternly.

"I found it," growled Keene, resentfully, as he wiped the blood from a bruise on his cheek. "I found it in the street this morning."

"Oh, you did!" cried the patrolman, with derisive severity. "I have seen chaps like you, who get up early in the morning just to go and look for watches in the street, and prowl about late at night for the same reason. And go to theatres and public meetings, and to all such shows, just to pick up watches when other people drop them. Come, come, my fine fellow, you'll have a chance to tell the story in court. Come along with me!"

"I tell you I found it!" roared Keene, with a great display of angry bravado. "I'll not be run in for picking up a watch in the gutter. I will not——"

"You tell me what you'll do or not do, and I'll crack your nut as if 'twas a walnut. Shove up your hands, you rascal! Up with them!"

And without more ado, the burly policeman jerked the detective's hands together and clapped a pair of manacles around his wrists; while Keene's bruised and bleeding face was a picture of impotent rage and resentment.

The officer paused for a moment and examined the watch, then glared at the detective who still was seated in the chair.

"So you are one of the Barton boy's abductors?" he cried, sternly. "That is better than I had thought, though I have had an eye on you for an hour. Now, come along with me!"

Without further opposition or remonstrance, Sheridan Keene now allowed himself to be jerked forcibly to his feet and marched from the dingy old shop, his wrists confined, his head bowed, and with the fervid ejaculations of the excited Jew constantly sounding in his ears.

So disturbed, in fact, was Mr. Rosnosky by the incident, which he perhaps feared

would reflect upon the character of his miserable old shop, that he followed the officer and his prisoner out upon the sidewalk, and even to the patrol-call box on the distant corner, voicing with characteristic gesticulations his protests all the way.

Meantime Mr. Bill Varney, very grateful and very exultant, and with a glowing admiration for the ostensible ruffian who had so boldly befriended him, stole from under cover and slipped out of the shop and away.

A little later, however, when his own danger was entirely removed, he might have been observed following the patrol wagon, even until he saw Sheridan Keene securely locked in the tombs.

CHAPTER III.

THE AIM IN VIEW.

In order to avoid recognition in quarters, where he well knew identity would immediately be discovered, Sheridan Keene constantly held his blood-stained handkerchief to his face, with the manacles still confining his wrists, until an opportunity came when he could get the eye and ear of the deputy then in charge, without general observation.

He was not kept long in suspense. Presently the deputy rose from his desk, and came out near the rail at which Keene was standing, as if about to summon the officer who had arrested him. Keene instantly sidled near him and interposed, giving him a quick, significant look and saying, softly:

"Don't betray me, Briggs! I am Sheridan Keene. Run me into a cell and question later."

If the deputy was surprised, he did not betray it. He knew the eyes of his man the moment he saw them; and, vaulting the rail, he strode straight to the officer who had made the arrest.

"What is that man brought in for, Collins?" he demanded, sharply.

"I caught him about pawning a watch," replied Officer Collins. "Here it is. It has the Barton boy's name in the case, the same who was kidnapped last night."

"Oh, ho!" exclaimed Briggs, taking the watch and chain from the patrolman's hand.

"I know this fellow, and he is up to his old tricks, is he? Give me your key to the bracelets, officer. I will look into this matter a little later."

Though delays were out of the usual course, Collins could offer no objection, and the deputy instantly returned to Keene and unlocked the manacles, then tossed them with the key at the feet of the waiting officer. Before the latter had recovered from stooping to get them, the deputy had roughly thrust the detective through a side door near by, and into an ante-room adjoining a row of cells.

The moment they were alone, Briggs burst out laughing.

"Well, well, this is a rum go," he cried, staring at Keene's bruised face. "What queer game are you now working, Keene?"

"How do I look?" asked Keene, dryly.

"As if you'd been on a bat."

"I feel so. That Collins must weigh fifteen stone, if he weighs an ounce. He handled me like a baby, and with as little mercy as a butcher. But I needs must put up the front of a tough, to blind a chap who witnessed it all, and I took my medicine like a nice little man. Some of it nearly stuck in my crop, though."

"But what is it all about, Keene?"

"Oh, I don't mind telling you, for I know I can trust you. But I wasn't dead sure of Collins; he's new to me, and the boot's not all on one leg, I take it. I will let you into the whole thing when Chief Watts arrives here. I want you to call him up on the quiet, and keep me under cover until he comes."

"Is this ticker in the case?" asked Briggs, who now vaguely began to see light through the darkness.

"Yes," nodded Keene; "and be sure you hang on to it. I have struck the trail of the knaves who kidnapped the Barton boy, I think; but I must follow it up in my own way. It might have been time next to wasted, and an opportunity lost, to have arrested only the chap with the watch. But Collins was after him, and had him as good as nipped, only for me."

"Only for you!" exclaimed the deputy, with amazement. "And what did you do?"

"Oh, I slipped the fly rascal into my coat, and myself into his, and let Collins arrest me

instead," Keene explained, with a grimace. "That's why I am here, Briggs, and so tastefully decorated. Now, dear fellow, get rid of Collins for me in any old way, and send down for the chief to come up here. I have a plan to submit to him, pending the consideration of which you'll kindly say nothing of me or of this case."

Briggs laughed long and deeply, as the truth came home to him in a general way.

"Yes, you can trust to my discretion, Keene," he rejoined, with a series of friendly little nods. "I will send Collins back to his beat, and cover the irregularity in some way. Then I'll dispatch an officer with a note to Chief Watts. How will that do, old man?"

"Bang up!" said Keene, approvingly.

"I will lock you up, meantime, to preclude your being observed, and to prevent your escape," laughed the deputy. "Will you have the morning paper?"

"If you can toss one in unnoticed."

"Leave that to me."

The message sent to headquarters brought Chief Watts in person about a half-hour later. The note had reached him just after his interview with Mr. Calvin Barton, and subsequent to the latter's departure for home. It had contained no definite information of the occasion for Sheridan Keene's unusual request, and both the surprise and satisfaction of Chief Inspector Watts were great, when he heard the detective's story, and immediately surmised the motives by which he had been actuated.

"Yet you have taken quite a chance, Keene," he gravely observed, as they sat alone discussing the situation somewhat later.

"Do you really think so, chief?"

"I do, indeed. This fellow Varney may now give us the slip entirely."

"But was it not better, chief, to have taken this chance, than to have arrested Varney then and there?" asked Sheridan Keene. "In that case, we should have had only one of the probable gang of kidnappers who are guilty of stealing this Barton child, and it is long odds that Varney would have revealed nothing, and that the others would have hurriedly cut away, and most likely have taken the lad along with them, even if they did not do him up entirely."

"That is true in a measure."

"As the matter now stands, however, I have made a good impression upon Varney, or a bad one that may work for good," argued Keene. "I have made a friend of him, I am sure, and I feel equally certain that he will make some kind of an attempt to pull me out of the scrape, into which he imagines I deliberately plunged for his sake. There is considerable loyalty among this class of scoundrels, Chief Watts, after all."

"Your idea, then, is to sustain the character you have assumed, and through cultivating Varney's friendship, run down the whole gang and recover the boy, is it?"

"That's it, precisely, chief," nodded Keene; "if in some apparently natural way, which will not tend to awaken Varney's suspicion, I can regain the liberty he believes I have lost."

"That can be accomplished."

"In that case, I think Varney would lay to make friends with me, and that I ultimately can work him so as to get in touch with his confederates and finally recover the boy. Don't you think it is worth trying?"

Knowing Sheridan Keene as he did, and having a high estimation of his sagacity and ability, Chief Watts readily assented.

"Yes, I do think so," he replied, thoughtfully. "I am not inclined to disparage your plan, Detective Keene, particularly as it thus far has been so admirably executed. I am considering how we can turn you loose again, without creating suspicion and alarm in the mind of Varney."

"Why not have me brought before the court in the ordinary way," suggested Keene; "and have it quietly pre-arranged that, after the hearing, I shall effect my escape from the prisoner's dock in some way."

"You would be recognized in court, I fear," Chief Inspector Watts replied; "and then the truth might leak out, and possibly come to Varney's ears."

"I think a recognition could be prevented, even without a disguise, which, of course, would not do in this case," Keene replied. "That is one reason why I provoked Collins into banging me up so severely. In my present garb, with my features well patched up with plaster, and given such unnatural dis-

tortion as I may see fit to adopt, I think I can safely hazard recognition.

"If it were possible, it would simplify things very much," said Chief Watts, yet not without some misgivings. "Of course, we can let you escape from here, but that would at once be thought suspicious."

"It wouldn't do at all," said Keene, shaking his head. "This Varney is not a fool, I know by his looks. He more likely is a bold and desperate fellow, who will himself take a chance to even up things with me. I infer that from what he said in the shop of the pawnbroker. Now, if I can run the gauntlet of the court room, and then break away, I feel sure Varney and I will come together. The rest should be easy, chief, for the fact that he had the Barton boy's watch evidently connects him in some way with the boy's abductors."

"I do not quite understand why he was in such haste to pawn the watch, however," Chief Watts remarked, thoughtfully.

"Nor I, chief, as far as that goes."

"But that is of secondary importance, however," was the reply. "I have been revolving your plan in mind, Keene, and I think we will adopt it. I will lay the whole thing before the district attorney, and so adjust the details with him, and possibly with the court, that at least some semblance of a trial shall be had, for the purpose of blinding Varney and giving color to this curious part you are playing. I will decide later how your ostensible escape may best be effected."

"Meantime, chief, I think I had better be confined here in the usual way, if I am to be brought before the court to-morrow morning."

"The sooner the better, I think."

"So do I."

"I will give further color to the thing," added Chief Watts, "by telling the reporters that one of the gang guilty of kidnapping the boy has been arrested. The story, with all the evidence, will go into the evening papers, and will probably be read by the scoundrels." "No doubt of it, chief, and that is a good idea."

"Moreover, there will be a good many drunks before the municipal court in the morning, as a result of to-night's celebration,

and I will plan for your escape in some way from the dock. I will come around to you later, when the details are all arranged."

"I shall be here, chief," laughed Keene, who was eager to continue the project he had so impulsively and brilliantly inaugurated. "By the way, what do you say is the name of Barton's step-brother?"

"David Barton."

"Have you wired to Oregon concerning him, may I ask?"

"Yes, I have," replied Chief Watts, rising. "I want his record, if I can get it, and to trace him from there, if possible, assuming that I am right in my suspicions. I will ascertain, also, the name of the man his mother ran off with, and inform you. It may be well for you to know these details, should you succeed in working yourself into touch with this gang of social wolves."

"I think I shall succeed, chief!" exclaimed Keene, with a decisive head-shake. "Surely, with your help."

"We will try it, at all events," rejoined Chief Watts, extending his hand. "I will see you again before night, and then will fully inform you."

It was the first day and night that Sheridan Keene ever spent in custody, even though voluntarily; but, under the hazardous circumstances, the thought of venturing out upon the street was not to be considered.

CHAPTER IV.

SHERIDAN KEENE IN THE PRISONER'S DOCK.

It is said that birds of a feather flock together, and that a man may be known by the company he keeps. Possibly, in the truth of these aphorisms may be found one reason why Sheridan Keene, with no other disguise than a blacked eye, a well-patched cheek, and such facial distortion as he was eminently capable of producing, was able to evade recognition in the municipal court next morning, and execute the artful ruse which he and Chief Inspector Watts had carefully planned.

As nobody, except the few necessarily let into the secret, expected to see such a man as Sheridan Keene amid the array of drunks

and petty malefactors filling the municipal dock that morning, nobody even thought of looking for him there, or identifying him with the vicious-looking and desperately-battered young ruffian still in the faded top-coat, and carrying a brown derby in one of his soiled hands.

Yet Sheridan Keene kept well out of sight amid the motley crowd of prisoners until his case was called, which Chief Watts had insured should be one of the first on the docket. Then Keene sullenly entered the prisoner's dock, obedient to an officer's command, where he stood with shoulders sloped and head half-hanging, and his face a repulsive picture of vice, resentfully confronted by justice.

The routine of preliminaries, the clerk's reading of the charge, and the testimony of Officer Collins, were speedily ended; and not until then did the magistrate deign even to glance at the prisoner.

The great crowd of spectators, however, were displaying an eager interest in him. The newspapers of that morning and the previous evening had contained effective stories of the arrest of one of the abductors of the Barton boy, and the very general sympathy augmented the crowd which morbid curiosity invariably brings into the municipal court each morning. That Keene's artful assumption was decidedly effective, moreover, was manifest in the general disgust and aversion with which he was regarded.

It was nearly half-past ten when the assistant district attorney rose to question Keene; and the inquiries, though, of course, the fact was not generally known, were conducted on a line already planned, and calculated to end the hearing as quickly as should be consistent with the aims in view. That Varney, or some of his confederates, would be in the court room, none of those informed were inclined to doubt.

"Why have you pleaded not guilty to this charge, prisoner?" the attorney at once demanded, sternly. "Don't you realize your situation, and that the evidence against you is almost conclusive? Why don't you tell the whole truth at once, and mitigate your punishment by a confession, and by giving

the information which will enable the officers to recover the Barton boy? It will be the wisest step you can take."

"I dunno nothing about the Barton boy," growled Sheridan Keene, glaring across at the attorney under his bent brows. "I have told you the truth, and you can take it for what you think it is worth."

"Do you mean to assert that you found this watch on Beacon street last Tuesday evening?" cried the attorney.

"That's just what I mean, and just what I did," was the surly rejoinder.

"Were you alone when you found it?"

"Aye, I was."

"Why did you not advertise for the owner, like an honest man?"

"The owner'd no business to lose it, and I had a better use for it," said Keene, with hand-dog frankness. "I told Jim Gibson that night where I'd found it, and what I was going to do with it. He'll say the same thing, if you ain't so stuck on making me do time that you don't want to question him."

"We'll hear later what your friend Mr. Gibson has to say," returned the attorney, frowning. "Where do you live when at home?"

"Over in South Boston, on Cove street."

"How long have you been living there?"

"Only a little while. About a month."

"Where were you last Tuesday evening, between eight and ten?"

"In three or four places here in town," said Keene, with steady sullenness. "I was around with Gibson——"

"May it please your honor," Chief Watts here interposed, rising from a chair in the inclosure, "I have investigated the statements this man has made, and I find that he has told the truth to some extent. I have learned beyond doubt, where he was most of Tuesday evening, and I am satisfied he personally had no hand in kidnapping the Barton boy. To that extent he has established a satisfactory alibi. The fact that he was arrested with the Barton boy's watch in his possession, and about to pawn it, connects him so directly with the parties guilty of the lad's abduction, however, that I respect-

fully submit that he should be held in custody, pending my further investigations."

This interposition on the part of the dignified chief of the detective service appeared to have much weight with the magistrate. He bowed gravely, casting another glance at the prisoner, then said to the attorney:

"Is the witness, Gibson, in court?"

"Yes, your honor," was the reply.

"Have him take the stand."

At a sign from the court clerk, a roughly-clad man readily came forward and took a position in the witness-box. He was, however, one of the city inspectors, made up for the part he had been instructed to play.

"Do you know the prisoner, Mr. Gibson?" the judge personally asked, gravely addressing the witness.

"Yes, your honor, I do," the inspector replied, with a quick head-shake.

"How long have you known him?"

"Only a week or two, your honor. He hasn't lived about here very long; but what I have seen of him has been all right enough."

"Does he live near you?"

"He lodges in the same house, your honor."

"What is your vocation, Mr. Gibson?"

"I am a moulder, your honor."

"Were you in the company of the prisoner during the most of Tuesday evening last?"

"All of it, your honor. From the time we had supper till near midnight."

"What were you doing?"

"We came over from South Boston to go to the theatre, your honor; but we got broke buying a few drinks, so didn't go. We were in several places, as I have proved to the chief inspector, your honor."

"Do you know anything more about the prisoner, Mr. Gibson, than what he has personally told you?"

"No, your honor, I don't, as far as that goes," Gibson slowly replied, with a glance across at Keene's evil-looking countenance.

"That is all, Mr. Gibson," said the judge, signing him from the stand.

All this was being enacted solely to give color to the genuineness of the inquiry, and

to establish for Sheridan Keene a character which should appeal the more strongly to Varney and his confederates, in event that the detective subsequently was able to come in contact with them.

"Have you anything more to say for yourself, prisoner, or of this case?" the judge now demanded, turning to Keene and sternly regarding him.

"I have said all I can say, your honor, unless I lie about it," replied Keene, with a surly upward glance at the judge's face.

The magistrate called the attorney and Chief Watts to the bench, and for five or ten minutes a whispered conversation was held. At the end of that time the two men withdrew, and presently the clerk of the court arose and said, with curt brevity:

"The prisoner is committed without bail. Remove him, officer!"

CHAPTER V.

THE OTHER MAN.

Upon no observer ignorant of his true identity and purpose, had the prisoner made a favorable impression—save upon one man alone.

This man was one who had been arrested for being drunk and disorderly the night before, and he was then in the dock with the other prisoners.

He was a thick-set man of fifty, and looked as rough and begrimed as a coal-heaver. Several days' growth of beard added to the general repulsiveness of his features, which were red and inflamed with pimply blotches, as if there scarce had been a limit to the fellow's brutal dissipation. Even while he stood in the dock, he was mumbling under his breath and swaying unsteadily, as if the effects of the alcohol were still upon him; but at no time did he appear to have any interest in the doings or the fate of Sheridan Keene.

Yet not a word or movement had escaped this uncouth fellow's observation. If he was one of Varney's confederates, he could have found no fault with the attitude taken by Keene, who in no way had betrayed Varney. He had concealed the episode in the pawnshop, by which Varney had

been able to escape; and he now seemed willing to suffer even longer imprisonment, and take the chances of his own ultimate release, rather than give Varney the worst of it by exposure.

Such loyalty as this to an impulsive friendship could not but have weight with any man, despite that such a ruffian as Keene certainly appeared to be might possibly have been actuated to this by the hope of subsequent gain.

There was a great stir in the court room when Keene was removed from the prisoners' box to the dock, from which he presumably was to be taken out by a side door through which the prisoners had entered, and thence the way he had come.

This door gave an egress to the long corridor of the court-house, in which half a score of officers were generally stationed, or engaged at that hour of the day; but on this particular morning, possibly through the agency of Chief Watts, the corridor was almost deserted. For it had been planned that at this time Sheridan Keene should make his escape, and though a great cry was to be raised, he was to be allowed to get away.

As Keene passed through the gate returning him to the dock, the officer who had him in charge was purposely detained by Chief Watts, who engaged him in conversation; while Sheridan Keene, as if oblivious to the fact, continued to press his way among the prisoners and gradually approach the side door, at which an officer was usually stationed.

The unforeseen, or what was possibly foreseen by Keene alone, then occurred.

The ruffian described above suddenly crowded nearer the approaching detective, and in a way that briefly prevented the latter from passing. At the same time he muttered quickly, giving Keene a swift, intelligent glance:

"Would ye tumble, pal, if a house fell on ye?"

Sheridan Keene instantly guessed aright; this was the fellow Varney had promised to have in court. The detective played his own part to perfection. He started slightly, glared fiercely at the ruffian, then suddenly

seemed to comprehend at what the fellow was driving.

"Aye, I would," he whispered, hurriedly. "Say it!"

"There's no cop on the door," hissed the other, now forcibly grabbing Keene by the arm. "He's been called off. I will have the jim-jams shortly, and you make a break for the street. Are you on?"

"Have 'em now!" cried Keene, scarce above his breath.

Chief Watts saw that Keene had delayed the plan arranged, but he was sure the detective knew his business, and he still held the officer in conversation.

"Hold a bit," the ruffian quickly muttered, still clutching Keene by the arm. "Turn right in the corridor, and take the side door to the street. Then turn left and the second corner right. There'll be a team waiting. Are you with me?"

"Sure! Make haste!" gasped Keene, with eyes ablaze as if with sudden excitement. "Give a yell!"

The interchange of hurried conversation had required only a few seconds, and had hardly been noticed by those in the dock, most of whom were absorbed in their own misfortunes. In another moment, however, following Keene's last word, the entire court room was in confusion and a tumult.

A mingled roar and shriek, like that of a maniac, had suddenly broken the comparative silence. It thrilled every hearer with alarm and horror, and brought every eye in the direction of the sound. The prisoner's dock was in indescribable confusion, and the scene it presented was one the like of which is rarely witnessed even in the violent wards of the insane asylum.

The man by whom Keene had been so significantly accosted had apparently gone into a severe attack of *delirium tremens*. With face horribly convulsed and distorted, with eyes rolled upward, with repeated shrieks and yells issuing from his foam-flecked lips, he was laying about him right and left with his powerful arms, into which the strength of a giant seemed suddenly to have been infused.

Some of the prisoners had been thrown to the floor by his violence; a few were

vainly seeking to seize and hold him, while others were wildly clambering over the high enclosure.

The effect in other parts of the court room may be imagined. The judge on the bench had started to his feet. Lawyers and spectators had arisen and the more remote were climbing into chairs, better to view the scene of the disturbance. Sheriffs, detectives and policemen were rushing toward the spot from all directions, and the officer who had charge of Sheridan Keene was quite ignoring the latter, and now was making strenuous efforts to get within reach of the apparently crazy prisoner.

Keene did not wait to see how the ruffian fared. If his conduct was genuine, even, which the detective now was suddenly inclined to doubt, he knew the offense was only the ordinary case of drunk and disorderly conduct; but which more probably had been feigned in order to accomplish this very design, and to repay if possible, the service he himself had rendered Bill Varney. He knew the fellow would finally be pacified, and providing his design was not suspected, would probably be released by the court upon payment of his fine.

Hence when the first yell broke from the man, and he went into his paroxysm of violence, Keene instantly made a break for the street.

He dropped to one knee, ducked behind two of the nearest prisoners, and in another moment, and in the very heat of the excitement and uproar, succeeded in reaching the side door.

Then, above all the tumult, a furious cry of command came from Chief Inspector Watts.

"Look out for that man!" he thundered, pointing toward the detective. "Officer, stop that prisoner! You'll lose your man!"

The officer appeared confused. Confusion, in fact, reigned on every side. The whole place was in an indescribable uproar.

Sheridan Keene, meantime, dashed through the side door and gained the corridor. An officer there made a bluff at stopping him, and was hurled against the wall and thrown headlong to the floor.

Twenty feet beyond were two men in

civilian dress, evidently lawyers, or men with business in the criminal court or in one of the other sessions. They saw Keene coming and at once suspected he was an escaping prisoner. They, too, undertook to stop him; and unlike that of the officer, the attempt they made was genuine.

Sheridan Keene had no alternative but that of handling them with a violence which the emergency required. There was an ugly fire in his eyes as he neared them, running at the top of his speed.

"Hold! Stop!" roared one.

"Lay hold of him, Tom," yelled his companion.

"Get out of my way, both of you!" thundered Keene, with a display of passion that should have awed and warned him.

Then the detective's clenched hand shot out straight from his shoulder. It caught one of his opposers, the more formidable, squarely on the jaw and sent him crashing to the floor.

The other, a lean little fellow with a green baize bag in his hand, instantly decided that discretion was the better part of valor, and he sprang impulsively to one side against the wall, and suffered the detective to rush by unmolested.

Now there was a great hue and cry behind him. Two or three commonly-dressed young women were screaming with fright. Officers were appearing from every direction, and some were tearing madly after the fleeing man; but the pursuit now was all behind him.

With the directions given him by the ruffian in the prisoner's dock still in mind, Keene darted out of the side door at the right of the long corridor, and quickly gained the street. There was only a few people in the immediate neighborhood, and these had not yet heard the sound of the disturbance, hence gave only cursory interest to the running man.

Turning right, as directed, which he now knew would result in his being aided by the very man whom he was seeking to bring into closer relations, Keene ran two blocks at the top of his speed, leaving the hue and cry of officers and citizens well behind him, and dashed round the corner to the right.

As the ruffian had stated, a team was standing at the curbing, not twenty yards away. It was a rather worn box-buggy with the top raised, and the very man Keene had expected to see occupied the seat, with the ribbons in his hand. The man was Bill Varney, whom Keene had saved from arrest in the pawnshop.

"This way, pal!" he cried, excitedly, the moment Keene turned the corner. "Get in here!"

It required but a moment for Sheridan Keene to join the man on the seat, and before the foremost of his pursuers had rounded the corner, the vehicle and its two occupants was whirling rapidly away, rattling furiously over the pavements, and passing approaching teams with a rush and recklessness which quickly demonstrated the desperate and dare-devil spirit of Mr. Bill Varney, as well as his skill as a driver.

"Now we're off, pal, and may the devil take the hindmost!" he cried, excitedly, the moment they were under way. "By heaven, pal, Dave Brackett is a jim-dandy. Look back and see how we make it."

Panting from his violent exertions, Keene looked out through the small oval glass in the rear curtain of the vehicle, and immediately gave vent to a laugh of evil triumph.

"We're well away, Varney!" he exclaimed, above the noise of the rattling wheels. "They never can catch us."

"Bet your life they can't. Not with this old rack of a pacer."

"They're giving it up."

"They're good men and wise," growled Varney, never for a moment turning his attention from the horse. "And you're a better man, pal! A better man than the best of 'em. What's your name?"

Keene gave him the name under which he had been arraigned in court.

"Jim Haggett," he quickly replied. "Was Brackett the man I saw in the dock, the one who gave me the pointer how to escape?"

Varney laughed.

"Then he got at you, did he?"

"Dead easy."

"Let Dave alone for that. 'Twas my idea to stand by you, pal, as you stood by me when the cop would have arrested me; but Dave

was the one who thought of the scheme and worked it. We was feared you might be held, or give the whole thing away, and Dave wanted a word with you before you could do that."

"Giving things away ain't in my line," growled Keene. "I'd not have thrown you down, 'cause I knew they couldn't hold me only for a short time, at the longest."

"Right again, pal! But we wanted to make sure," cried Varney, approvingly. "You've a good nut on your neck, and you'll be no loser for what you did for me. Dave'll get off with a fine, and then we'll fix you up right, see?"

"Look out for that herdic!"

"I see it," growled Varney, skillfully passing a rapidly-driven herdic. "We'll cross the bridge and drop the team, then get under cover. The thing will be easy, now, and they'll have a good job to nail us. I told you I'd not go back on you."

"Nor have you, Varney," Keene cried, warmly. "You were as good as your word, and I am glad I stood by you."

"You'll not lose by it, pal, as I told you."

They now were tearing across the bridge, and rapidly entering lower Cambridge. Scarce five minutes had passed since Sheridan Keene made his break from the court room. Just over the bridge, Varney dropped the team and left it standing at the curbing.

"This way, pal!" he cried.

In five minutes more they were under cover, and safe from immediate apprehension.

And so it was that the Lion made his way into the very lair of the Wolves.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LAIR AND THE WOLVES.

At a late hour in the evening of that same day, four men were seated in a miserable room in one of the dilapidated wooden dwellings which are to be found in great numbers in some of the less reputable districts of lower Cambridge.

The place presented a most abject appearance. The house was in total darkness and wholly unfurnished, save alone the room in which the men were seated. It was a back

room on the second floor. A common deal table without a cloth occupied the middle of the floor, and around this the men were seated in the cheapest kind of wooden chairs. One, in fact, occupied a soap box.

A smoky petroleum lamp burned in a bracket on the faded wall at one side, and shed a feeble light over the impoverished surroundings. There was no curtain at the single window of the room, but the outer blinds had been closed, and two sheets of heavy brown paper had been nailed to the casing, all of which effectively prevented any gleam of light being detected from without.

On the table was a large paper bag, containing all that remained of a dozen rolls and a supply of pressed ham. Near this was a quart bottle of liquor, with the cork removed; but glasses were evidently a luxury for which no provision had been made, and the bottle itself served for general use when a draught of the fiery contents was desired by any of this desperate and dissolute party. The place had a musty smell, and was cold and damp, as if the house had been vacant for a long time, and without a fire to dry its chill and miserable interior.

Of the men seated around the table, one was Detective Sheridan Keene. He now had exchanged outer garments with Mr. Bill Varney, and was clad in his own blue reefer and woolen cap. The plasters had been removed from his face, but one cheek still carried the dark bruise he voluntarily had received, in order to execute the desperate strategy he had so shrewdly designed and impulsively undertaken. Even with these improvements, he still looked as rough and tough as any of the party.

One of his companions was Bill Varney, with whom he had cautiously entered the place earlier in the day. Another was a man who had been awaiting them, a fellow with red hair and pock-marked features, whom Varney had called by a nickname evidently, that of "Reddy," and whose true name Keene had not yet discovered.

The third was the powerful, rugged man whom Keene had encountered in the prisoner's dock, and who was called Dave Brackett. His appearance had been improved the most of all. He had changed his clothes, and

now wore a very respectable-looking suit of dark woolen. The dirt and blotches had been removed from his face, and only faint rings under his keen, dark eyes indicated a life of dissipation. Taken altogether, he was not a repulsive man, yet his countenance was stamped with the invariable expression of a rogue, if not that of a criminal and convict.

That he was the leader of this gang of reprobates, whom Keene now felt sure were the parties guilty of kidnapping the Barton boy, the detective already had seen sufficient indications.

"I'd have been here before," Brackett explained, he having entered the place only after the darkness of evening had fallen. "But I was detained by a lot of red tape, before I could settle my fine and get away. So you tumbled to the fact that I was a pal of Varney, when I nailed you in the dock, did you, Haggett," he added, with his heavy voice held somewhat in check, and his dark eyes searching Sheridan Keene's face as well as the inferior lamplight permitted.

"I didn't at first, Brackett," Keene answered, never for a moment diverted from the desperate part he was playing. "Then it came to me like, and I tumbled. 'Twas very good in you to take chances, and I will never forget how you looked when you went off your perch. 'Twas a clever move, that."

Brackett laughed deeply, evidently flattered by the approval of this ostensible young ruffian.

"Oh, 'twa'n't bad, I'll admit," he replied, nodding. "They handled me rough for a minute, and then I pretended I came to myself. It wa'n't a bad move, for a fact; but the chance wasn't taken all for you, Mr. Haggett, don't think that. I was afraid you'd blow the whole business of the skit with Varney, and I wanted to keep you from doing that, if I could. But I couldn't get near you till after you were put in the box."

"Oh, I wouldn't 'a blowed!" exclaimed Keene, shaking his head.

"I found that out later."

"I'm no short lobster."

"I have better than your word for it now," said Brackett, deeply, "and I have taken a great fancy to you, Haggett, for the favor. 'Twas bad business, our trying to shove the

watch; but I rather thought it might be safely done, and the fact is we're short of money. D'ye happen to have any?"

"Only a bit of change," replied Keene, somewhat gloomily. "I went into the Jew's only to shove up my knife, if he'd let go any dust on it."

"I see," commented Mr. Brackett, nodding; and if he had even the most vague suspicion of Sheridan Keene, every move and explanation of the latter served to steadily dispel it.

"But, say, Haggett," he added, leaning on the table to be nearer the man addressed; "you must have had some motive in hiding the truth, when you ought to have known a clean breast of it would have set you free."

Keene's brows settled a trifle, and his eyes rose to squarely meet those of the speaker, whose pointed remark evidently had not been made without a purpose.

"So I did have," the detective quickly admitted.

"What was it, Haggett?" demanded Dave Brackett. "And remember this, my lad, you can't lose, and you may win, by coming down flat-footed with me."

Keene gave his head an indifferent toss.

"I've no reason to be anything else than flat-footed," he returned, reaching for the bottle and pretending to drink a swallow.

"The whole business is this," he added, with quite aggressive frankness. "I heard 'em say in the tombs, when the infernal bluebottle, who gave me this bad eye turned in the watch along with me, that it belonged to a kid who was stolen the night before."

"They said that, did they?"

"Aye, they did," nodded Keene. "So I says to myself, I did, that I'd close my trap about seeing Varney in the pawn-shop, and take the chance of getting loose on my own hook. I knew I could throw Varney down if I wanted to, and split the whole business, but I wouldn't do that, you know."

"I saw that you wouldn't," nodded Brackett, with grim approval.

"No, I am no short lobster," Keene bluntly repeated. "I says to myself, I did, if I get away on my own nerve, like as not I'll run agin Varney outside, and be let into the game along with him."

"Oh, that was your idea, was it?" Brackett demanded.

"Aye, 'twas," Keene again nodded. "I don't claim I did it all for Varney, mind you. I had myself in view as well. I wa'n't dead sure they were right about a boy being stolen, you know; but I said to myself, I did, that I'd take the chance. That's why I did it, Brackett, and for no other reason. Now what do you say?"

"About what?" Brackett grimly inquired.

"About letting me into the game, of course," Keene answered, in rather aggressive tones. "Sure I don't claim to know what 'tis," he went on, nodding an emphasis to his words. "I am, not meaning to interfere, nor to bother with what's not my business; don't think that. But I did a turn for you, and now you've a chance to do a turn for me, Brackett. I am dead broke, and I ain't looking for work. But if there's any game on that'll pay a covey an honest dollar, I'd like to be counted in and given a chance at the cards."

"You think you would, do you?" said Brackett, smiling oddly.

"Aye, I would, sir. And I am no hog, by the way. I don't ask for the whole pot, nor anything like it. But I said to myself, I did, if there's a game on and something to be won, it's as like as not, since I've done the square by them, they'll do the square by me. I'll do my part from now on, mind you, and give what's asked of me and take what's offered. That ought to be good enough for any man, game or no game, and I will be the very last to squeal in case the game breaks down and I am a loser. Now what do you say, Brackett, since I've come down flat-footed, the same as you asked me to do?"

Not for a moment had Brackett ceased his searching scrutiny of the speaker's face; but the detective art of Sheridan Keene was greater far than the other's discernment, and the man would have been more than mortal who could have discovered duplicity in the hang-dog countenance, its steady flow of vulgar vernacularisms, and the plausible explanations and argument with which Detective Keene enacted the part he was playing.

Back of all this was that magnetic personality, moreover, the influence of which outward appearances could by no means destroy; and, disregardless of the service already rendered and the loyalty afterward displayed, Brackett felt himself irresistibly attracted to this outspoken young ruffian.

"What do I say?" he repeated slowly, with subdued resonance of tone. "What would you say, Haggett, if I told you this game was a desperate one, and likely to cost you your neck?"

"I'd ask what there was for me at the finish, so be it I still had my neck," Keene answered, with a dryness which brought a laugh to Varney's lips.

"I told you so, Dave, old pal," he cried, eagerly. "I'll lay my share of the pot agin Haggett's nerve and daring. I had him sized from the moment I saw him show his colors in the pawnshop, and put up a front to the cop. So help me heaven! it was a mix-up I'd not like to have been in myself."

"So I infer from his looks," nodded Brackett.

"I say this much more about any gain," said Keene, in his artful fashion. "I will not split, even if you'll now throw me down. I'm not looking to give you the worst of it, and if you say no to my offer, I'll go my way and keep my trap closed, and there's an end of it. I am no peacher. I only says to myself, I did, if there's a game on and I can take a hand, like as not they'll use me up and up, as I have tried to use them. Do you see, boys? That's me, and that's all there is to it."

And Sheridan Keene again tried the bottle, with scarce a drop having passed his lips.

With this final argument, even Dave Brackett was inclined to favor this addition to his forces; but he was not a man to show his colors freely. He drew his chair nearer the table, followed Keene in the pull at the bottle, then said, as he set it down:

"Will you do what you're told in this, Haggett, and take what you're offered?"

"I said I'd do that," Keene quietly answered, in his effective way.

"There are ways in which I can use you,"

Brackett continued. "Leastwise, since you've probably saved the game from a bad break, I am not averse to doing the right thing by you."

"The right thing is all I want, and I will do my part to earn it."

"The most dangerous part has been done," said Brackett, shortly. "Yet there are perils still ahead. If you care to share these along with us, we will do the square thing by you, sure, and will take you in with that understanding. If it's a go on that basis—shake!"

Sheridan Keene instantly thrust his hand across the table and grasped that of the speaker, giving him a grip that made him wince. And none could have known better than Keene knew at that moment that he carried his life in his hand with this man, should he be caught in treachery.

This final adjustment of relations evidently gave intense delight to Mr. Bill Varney. He sprang up and shook Keene's hand with both of his, and declared his satisfaction in language far more expressive than refined, and showed in divers ways that the incident in the pawnshop had gained this quick-witted and dare-devil stranger a most exalted place in his evil estimation. What would have happened had he so much as dreamt the truth, can only be surmised!

"Shake with Reddy, also," commanded Dave Brackett; "and now, Haggett, we're one for all and all for one; and there's a knife or an ounce of lead for either coward or traitor."

"So be it; if I prove to be either, give me a dose of both," said Keene, approvingly, meeting him eye to eye.

Both the answer and the look pleased Dave Brackett.

"Now, here's the game," he rejoined, quickly; "along with the perils and the profit. I'd ha' been a fool, if I hadn't known long ago that you were sure 'twas us who stole the Barton boy. You did right in telling me you knew that, and I like you all the better for not seeking to force yourself into the game against my will."

"I'd not ha' done that," said Keene, shaking his head. "No, nor split, if you hadn't took up with me."

"I believe you, Haggett," was the reply. "You've shown it already. Now I'll tell you openly, we kidnapped the Barton boy, and we came a d—d long distance to do it, and we waited many a day for the purpose and a good chance. We lifted the lad on the street last Tuesday night, and by a bit of blarney that one of his playmates wanted to see him, we got him into a team. 'Twas easy to close his lips after that, and now he's under cover, and in hands that'll hold him fast till he's wanted."

Keene wondered whose hands they were, and where; but he inferred that the lad was not in the house with them, and he was too shrewd to venture asking impertinent questions.

"Now," continued Brackett, "the boy's father must come down with the stuff, and the peril lies in steadily forcing him to it, and getting it safe into our hands, without being trapped by some other counter game of his and the police. We'll not take 'no' for an answer. God bear witness to it, he'll never see that kid again if he refuses what I demand. With me, Haggett, there's more than mere money in it. I've an old score to pay, and I am claiming only what's my own. And I'll have it, too," Brackett added, with an oath; "or the blood in my veins is as near water as that of the man I mean to best."

He had warmed to the subject, as men will do when voicing a bitter resentment which, perhaps, for years has been inspiring day-dreams of vengeance. The fire, in the depths of his eyes was growing brighter. A spot of red burned in either cheek; his jaw was set, and his lips drawn, showing his teeth and giving to his dark face an expression of exceedingly resentful cruelty.

Sheridan Keene did not need to ask the meaning of all this. Chief Inspector Watts had confided to him the dark page of family history revealed by Calvin Barton, and the detective now felt sure that the man opposite was none other than Barton's own step-brother, and that he had returned from the far West after many years, solely to execute this atrocious outrage.

And the face of Dave Brackett, or Dave Barton, as he truthfully should have been

called, showed, as he sat briefly staring at the rude table, that he was quite worthy the evil reputation his own brother had given him, and fully capable of all that his bitter threats had implied.

Keene fully realized how necessary it was to be artful with such a knave as this. Only by constant watchfulness over himself, and by the very acme of sagacity, could he hope to best him. As to arresting these men, that would have been comparatively easy; but if Brackett's own words were reliable, of which Keene had not a doubt, there were other confederates in this iniquitous plot, and the recovery of the Barton boy might not result from Dave Brackett's arrest.

Sheridan Keene was not a man to do things by halves. He had not thought of personal danger. He was resolved to capture the whole gang, or none, and to rescue the kidnapped boy.

Without a change of countenance, on hearing Brackett's vengeful utterance, with his steady gaze still meeting the other's glowing eyes, Keene leaned his elbows on the table, and said, approvingly:

"It's a good scheme, and well worked so far, Brackett. D'ye feel sure you can trust me to do my part of what's left to be done?"

"If I didn't, I'd not have gone as far as I have."

"What's the figger set for the boy's return?"

"Fifty thousand dollars."

"It's worth it!" Keene exclaimed, with a nod. "But can the kid's old man raise a ransom like that?"

"Faugh!" cried Brackett; "Calvin Barton is worth millions."

"Better'n better," nodded Keene. "D'ye say the lad is safe from the police? From what I heard in the tombs, I'd say the whole d—d force of bluebottles were in search for him."

"Let 'em enjoy their still hunt," said Brackett, with a display of vicious disdain. "They'll not find him. And if they were to run us down, they'd be no better off. The boy still would be out of their reach, and is in danger of his life the moment I am cornered. No, no, Haggett, they'll not find the

boy. I'm out for revenge, in case I fail to get the ransom demanded."

"I'd sooner you'd get the money," growled Keene, with avaricious frankness.

"So would all of us," cried Varney.

"We shall get it," said Brackett, quietly. "Never doubt that."

"Have you laid any plan for getting at the old man, and forcing him into giving up?" asked Keene, with an artful display of evil interest.

"Not fully," Brackett slowly answered. "The fact is, we all are somewhat of strangers in this city, and don't perfectly know the lay of the land. That's one reason why I was willing to have your assistance, Mr. Haggett."

"Good enough, pal," exclaimed Keene. "I suppose I can call you that now?"

"Sure you can," said Brackett, warmly. "Then, again, you were so quick and clever in the pawnshop, and fooled the cop so shrewdly, that I thought you might help us invent some plan for winding up the job, and safely getting the money."

"That ought to be easy, if the old man is ready to give up the dough," growled Keene.

"I can do that much, sure."

"What method would you suggest, Mr. Haggett?" demanded Brackett, earnestly.

Keene scratched his head for a moment, then answered, slowly:

"Hold a bit and I will tell you."

to know what method he would advise in so desperate and important a matter. For it involved far more than the mere hoodwinking of a policeman in the shop of a purblind pawnbroker.

"I s'pose the sooner it's done, the better?" he finally observed, inquiringly, looking up to meet Brackett's gaze.

"The sooner it is done, the sooner we shall have the cash and be out of danger," Brackett answered, grimly.

"What's been done so far, more'n pinching the boy?"

"We sent a letter to Barton, saying the kid was stolen, and what ransom we demanded for his safe return."

"Any threats in it?"

"Only that we'd have the money or the boy's life, and that we meant business."

"'Twan't enough!" said Keene, shortly. "Any fool would know you meant business. Men ain't taking chances in lifting kids for fun."

"It was only a starter, Haggett, as far as that goes."

"He must have one for a wind-up, then!" Keene exclaimed, decisively. "Now, here's my idea of how the trick should be pulled off."

"Let's have it," said Brackett, eagerly.

"And I'll gamble it'll be ace high!" put in Varney, with open admiration.

Sheridan Keene stretched both arms upon the table, and stared Brackett in the face.

"To begin with," he argued, forcibly, "there must be no fooling, or beating round a bush. As you say, Brackett, the sooner it's done the better, and the sooner we'll be safe away. So I say again, there must be no fooling."

"You are dead right in that," assented Brackett.

"Now, this Barton man, the old covey, must be scared to his wits' end," Keene continued. "If he really thinks the kid's to be done up, he'll let go o' the stuff to prevent it. And he must be made to think so. Not only think so, Mr. Brackett—he must be made to know so!"

"That's the stuff!" cried Varney.

"Aye, and that's the only thing that'll work him!" declared Keene, flashing a quick glance

CHAPTER VII.

THE ACME OF KNAVERY.

With his elbows on the table and his chin buried in his palms, Sheridan Keene stared for several minutes straight at the black bottle a foot or two from the end of his nose, as if out of its stimulating suggestiveness he sought to draw some inspiration for accomplishing the outrageous knavery in view. The intense earnestness of his dark and frowning countenance was well calculated to inspire even greater confidence in him, and an interval of profound silence reigned in the miserable little room, during which the gaze of his interested observers scarce left his thoughtful face. One and all were curious

at the approving ruffian. "If the trick's to be turned, it must be done afore cops or detectives can make a move to prevent it. And it can be done only in one way, and that's by frightening the kid's old man into coming down with the dough. Now, that can be done with another letter, and it ought to be mailed to-night, so he'll get it in the morning."

"It can be written——"

"Wait a bit!" interposed Keene. "Don't go too fast. I'll tell you first what's next to be done. The letter must have the plan all in it, and be straight from the shoulder. It must tell Barton what we want done, and how we want it done. And it must give him a scare that'll force him to our terms. Then when he gets the letter in the morning—d'ye know if he's got a telephone in his house?"

"No, we don't. How the devil should we know?"

"Most o' these wealthy guys has 'em."

"Send Reddy out to look in one o' the books, Dave," suggested Varney.

"You wait till I've heard the whole plan," replied Brackett, discreetly.

"Here 'tis, then," Keene readily continued. "The letter must tell the old covey that the money must be ready for us to-morrow night. That won't give him much time for putting the cops onto tracing the letter. When he gets the letter in the morning, if he's got a telephone in his house we'll call him up from some place, and ask him if he's going to do what we demand. It'll be dead easy and safe enough to do that, 'cause none of us is known, and it'll take only a minute. Then we'll know just where we stand and what to look for."

"It's not a bad scheme," observed Brackett, approvingly.

"It'll all depend on what's in the letter," argued Keene. "I'll gamble the old man can be brought to his milk."

"Reddy, you slip out and go to some place pretty well away, and see if Barton has a telephone in his house."

"All right, Dave."

"If he has, take the number of it, to save us time in the morning."

"What's the man's full name, Dave?" and the pock-marked man rose to comply.

"Calvin E. Barton. Don't make any mistake."

"I'm not likely to, with what's hanging on it!" growled Reddy, pulling his cap over his brows as he vanished from the room.

His step then sounded down a creaky flight of back stairs, but no door was heard to close behind him. The work of these men was being done with a determination and caution that ordinarily should have insured ultimate success. Yet Sheridan Keene was already felt to be a valuable addition to their number.

With the departure of Reddy, the manner of Dave Brackett underwent a change, becoming that of a man who not only was favorably impressed with the plan submitted, but now was ready to adopt it. He drew up to the table, and addressing Keene, said deeply:

"I like the scheme, Haggett, and we'll give it a try. It will bring the game to a climax the quickest of anything, and that's what we want."

"Sure thing it is!"

"Now, about the letter. Can you write it?"

"Well, I ain't much with a pen, Dave," Keene demurred, with a familiar grin. "I s'pose I could work one on a pinch, but I reckon hens' tracks would be easier read after 'twas done."

"I don't like to take the chance of writing——"

"Wait a bit!" cried Keene, as if struck with another idea. "We'll say the letter must be given back to us along with the money. Then if the covey comes to time, there'll be no danger afterward from the letter."

"Capital!" said Brackett, with much approval. "I'll undertake to write it, in that case, and we'll make it up together. How'll that do?"

"Couldn't be better."

"Bring the paper and pencil, Bill!"

"It's ink, Dave," said Varney, rising from the soap box. "There ain't any pencils in the office."

"The ink, then," growled Brackett, laughing.

Mr. Varney, who was somewhat inclined to levity despite the desperate project in which they were engaged, now brought from a closet in one corner a block of common white

paper, with a pen and a small bottle of ink. Evidently in this very place the first letter received by Mr. Barton had been rudely scrawled.

"Will you have the electric light a bit nearer?" asked Mr. Varney, as he deposited the writing-materials upon the table.

"Put it down here," replied Brackett, curtly.

To the curtness Mr. Varney displayed not the slightest resentment. He removed the smoky oil lamp from the bracket on the wall and placed it upon the table.

"I reckon I'd best not put it too near the rum," he observed, with a grin at Sheridan Keene. "The fumes o' the liquor might catch fire, and we'd lose our best hold. Anything more, Mr. Davy?"

"Only your silence!" growled Brackett, thrusting him away.

Then he removed the cork from the bottle, dipped the pen in the ink, and looking across the table at the dark face of the detective, he asked, grimly:

"Now what d'ye say, Haggett? Have you been thinking it up?"

"Summut!" nodded Keene.

"Would you write it or print it? I printed the others, so as to throw 'em off."

"You don't want to throw 'em off!" objected Keene, with a shake of his head. "If they think they're dealing with fools and cowards, they'll be the more likely to give us a bluff in return, and so keep the thing hanging by the eyelids. The way to do is this: Write the letter in bang-up business shape, as if we knew what game we're up to, and meant just what we said. That's the only way, and the surest way."

"I don't know but you're right."

"Sure, he's right!" ventured Varney.

"How would you word it?" asked Brackett, whose own manner indicated that he was no expert with a pen, even if he had been tolerably educated in earlier days. "Give me your idea, Haggett, and then if we want to change it in any way we can write it over."

Keene scratched his head, and at length answered thoughtfully:

"Start it something like this, Brackett: Put down the covey's name first of all, and don't mind the dear sir."

"I have the name down."

"Oh, yes, he's a dear!" laughed Varney. "And how he loves us, eh!"

"Shut up, Bill!"

"Can't you write, Dave, when I'm talking?"

"No, I can't! Now keep quiet!"

"Then say like this," continued Keene, leaning over the table to observe the writer's efforts.

"Go ahead!"

"We have kidnapped your kid——"

"Wouldn't boy be better?"

"I reckon 'twould, Dave!" Keene assented, smiling within himself. "Kid ain't werry-refined! Say: 'We have kidnapped your boy, and demand fifty thousand dollars for his safe return.'"

"Oh, just think o' that!" cried the irrepressible Varney. "Fifty—oh, just whisper it to me once! I wouldn't do a thing with fifty thousand dollars!"

But neither of the two men now bent above the table gave further attention to his levity. The rays from the smoky lamp fell full on their dark faces, throwing into stronger relief the expressions of grim knavery there depicted. The eyes of both were aglow with intense interest, yet how widely different was the motive actuating each. The one was a knave of the deepest dye; the other a hero who, at the call of duty, took his life in his hands.

"Stick it in with letters and figgers, both, then there'll be no chance for a mistake, Dave!" advised Keene, watching the other's every movement.

"I'm doing it so," muttered Brackett, too absorbed in his work to look up. "That's not bad! Now what?"

"Say like this: 'If you pay us the money, the child will be returned as safe as when you last saw him; but if you refuse, we will put acid in his eyes and blind him.' Got that?"

"Yes!"

"Oh, think o' them little eyes!" moaned Varney, so convulsed with delight that he nearly upset his soap box. "Put acid in 'em! Oh, oh, but isn't that a sweet idea, and won't it please the baby's daddy! Oh, Haggett, you're a peach, a plum, a cherry!"

"Then say like this," continued Keene,

without a glance in the direction of Varney. "Then we will kidnap another millionaire's child that we have spotted, and demand a hundred thousand; and we will get it, for he will see the condition of your child, and will know that we mean business, and will not be monkeyed with or captured." Look out you get that all in, Dave!"

"I'll get it all in!"

"Get—it—all—in!" echoed Varney, dwelling upon each word with a drawl of excruciating delight. "Kidnap another—oh, me! oh, my! ain't that an idea for you! See the condition—oh, but won't the anxious old daddy's blood curdle at that! And what an idea for knockin' him off his pins, like as if the little kid was already gropin' in the dark! Oh, just let me grip your fin ag'in, Mr. Haggett—"

"Get out o' the way!" growled Keene, never lifting his gaze from the sheet on which Brackett's hand was resting, while the latter muttered darkly:

"Dry up, Varney, can't you?"

"It's very hard, Dave, under such inspirin' prospects; but I'll try, old pal; I'll try my best, on the level!"

"All ready, Dave? Then say like this——"

"Let her go!"

"Get the money all in gold'——"

"What's that for?" interrupted Brackett.

"It can't be marked so that we can't detect it."

"A good idea! Go on!"

"Put it in two white sacks, and drive alone in your buggy from your house to-morrow night, Thursday, at eight o'clock. Cross Harvard bridge, and drive to Sullivan square in Charlestown, then cross Mystic River bridge into Everett. Follow Broadway through Everett, and drive straight on toward Woodlawn Cemetery. When you come to a lantern that is lighted by the side of the road, place the money by the lantern, and at once turn your horse around and drive home."

"Do you know this locality, Haggett?" demanded Brackett, looking up.

"Aye, I do! I worked in the cemetery for a month about a year ago. There's a woodland near by, and the place couldn't be better. There are twenty ways of escape, in

case o' being cornered—but we'll not be cornered! This letter, afore I'm through, will bring the old man to the dough-dish."

"Go on with it, Haggett!"

"Put a red lantern on your buggy where it can be plainly seen, so we'll know you a mile off. This letter and every part of it must be returned with the money, and any attempt at capture will be the saddest thing you ever done. Don't forget the Ross boy! Old man Ross thought Byrnes and his detectives knew it all, but they didn't. He let them jolly him about their skill, and he died of a broken heart. Don't you be fooled in that way, or you'll do the same!"

"Oh, oh, but ain't that to the pint!"

"Mr. Barton," Keene went on dictating, with many a low vernacularism which Brackett corrected; "'you are up against it, and there is only one way out. Give up the coin! Money we want, and money we will get. If you don't give up, the next man will, for he will see that we mean business; and you can lead your boy around blind the rest of your days, and all you will have is the —— copper sympathy! Do the right thing by us, and we will do the same by you. If you refuse, you will see the saddest sight you ever seen!"

"This letter must not be seen by any one but you. If the police know its contents, they may try to capture us against your wish. So you see the danger if you let this be seen. To-morrow night, Thursday, or never! Follow these instructions, and no harm will befall you or yours."

As the last words of this hideous and threatening dictation fell from his lips, Sheridan Keene slowly drew back from the table and resumed his seat beside it.

"Did you sign the other letter, Dave?" he asked, quietly.

"Yes, I did," was the reply. "I signed it plain Jim."

"Then sign this one Jim, too, and then he'll be dead sure it comes from the same man."

"But, Lord above save us, Haggett, what a composition that one is!" cried Varney, caressing his thighs with irrepressible glee. "He'll never dream that came from you, Dave —never! never! It's more like a worser

knave than you are, Davy! worsen even than you!"

"I reckon the letter'll do just as it stands," muttered Brackett, utterly ignoring Varney's exclamations, and studiously scanning the sheet he, with some difficulty, had prepared. "Aye, I think this'll do the business, one way or the other, and do it quickly."

"Quickly is what's most needed, Mr. Brackett," observed Keene, now with indifferent interest.

"Aye, it will do!"

"Have you got an envelope?"

"A whole bunch of them. Get 'em, Varney. Hark!"

There was a sound from below, and the step of a man ascending the creaky stairs. Varney strode hurriedly to the door, and presently turned and muttered:

"It's only Reddy returning! Who the devil can know we're in here?"

"No one; we are safe enough," Brackett moodily answered. "Give me a jacket for this."

Varney brought out half a dozen envelopes and carelessly tossed them on the table.

"I'll give you enough, Davy," he grinned. "You're like to spoil many afore you can write one."

Brackett made no answer. He grimly folded the written sheet and enclosed it in one of the envelopes, which he securely sealed and addressed.

"Got the street and number?" asked Keene, with an eye to his subsequent movements.

"Yes, both!"

"D'ye want me to go and mail it, Dave?" inquired Varney, who was now inclined to go out, yet which Brackett firmly had opposed. "I will if you say so."

"Well, I don't say so!" Brackett sternly answered, rising and putting on his coat. "You are not to take chances by going out of here unless it is necessary—and you're to bear that in mind, Haggett, along with the others!"

"I'll do all the rest do, Brackett, never doubt that," Keene answered, nodding his assent.

"I'll mail the letter on my way to——" Then Brackett suddenly checked himself and turned to get his hat. "Stay here till morn-

ing, all of you," he added, with a parting head-shake. "I'll come in about seven."

Evidently he had no idea of returning that night, and Keene rightly suspected the gang had other quarters somewhere in the city, in which no doubt they had the Barton boy confined. In this, at present, lay the detective's greatest difficulty.

No sooner had Brackett gone than Varney threw himself prostrate upon the floor, growling that he was going to snatch a wink of sleep. Within a quarter-hour, Reddy, the pock-marked man, had followed suit.

CHAPTER VIII.

KEENE LAYS A TRAP.

It was long after midnight. One and two had struck from the church spires, the heavy, reverberating tones of the countless bells being about the only sounds that broke the gloomy silence. The multitudinous cars had ceased running, and the footfall of the guardian patrolman, or that of some belated pedestrian, fell with startling distinctness on pavement and sidewalk.

The oil in the smoky lamp was running low, and the rays of light, more feeble than ever, threw only into the dim relief amid the abject surroundings the two figures lying motionless upon the floor. They were sleeping—the deep, heavy sleep of semi-intoxication, despite that their bed was hard, and their pillows but coats removed from their own backs.

Sheridan Keene sat tipped back in a chair against the wall, his head resting against the casing of the door. Apparently he, too, was sleeping, if one might judge from the deep, regular breathing which for two long hours had sounded from his lips.

Yet he had not slept; not once had consciousness left him, nor for a moment had he ceased revolving in mind the situation confronting him, and the desperate contingencies involved. Yet it was a situation which, but for the peril of the Barton boy, he would have considered child's play. As it was, reading Dave Brackett aright, the utmost caution, discretion and sagacity were required.

To have separated from the company of

these wolves to whom he ostensibly had bound himself, and to attempt to secure aid except by craft alone, Keene fully realized might prove fatally foolish. What next must be done he knew must be done under their very eyes.

He had laid his plans while he sat there, apparently sleeping.

Presently he groaned and moved uneasily in his chair, and his eyes opened as if heavy with slumber. Every move was made against the possibility of alert observation by either man on the floor; he was less ready to trust them than they had been to trust him. He would take no chances that either was feigning sleep.

He presently tipped forward, rose from the chair, and tottered drowsily to the table. The bottle of liquor stood there, and near it lay several of the envelopes left by Dave Brackett.

Steadying himself with one hand on the table, Keene pretended to take a drink. When he replaced the bottle, he had adroitly secured under his palm one of the envelopes on which he had rested his hand. Then he looked about as if in search of the most desirable spot on the floor, and grumbling under his breath half the time, he finally stretched himself out as if to sleep. He had turned his back to his companions, and the rays of the lamp were shed in his face.

A half-hour passed.

Noiselessly, by slow degrees, he had slipped his notebook from an inner pocket, and detached one of the blank leaves. Then he fished out his pencil.

Lying prostrate is a difficult position in which to write, yet with ceaseless caution and ears alert, he inscribed the following:

"CHIEF WATTS:

"Shadow the inmates of house No. 71 — street, Cambridge; apparently vacant. Don't interfere." Game well in hand, but boy yet to be located. Instruct Barton to comply strictly with demands made on him in letter. No deviation therefrom.

"Send four men Thursday night, about nine, to Broadway extension near Woodlawn. Caution imperative! Brackett's letter received this morning will explain all. Compel him to show it. Instruct men to watch for

white lantern near side of road, and to lay low till signal is received from me.

"KEENE."

This he enclosed in the envelope he had secured from the table. He knew he would probably have no opportunity to procure a stamp and mail the missive. He resorted to the only other method that seemed feasible. He inscribed the envelope thus:

"TO THE FINDER:

"Take this immediately to Chief Inspector Watts, Police Headquarters, Pemberton Square, Boston.

"Do this without fail, and hurry it!

"INSPECTOR SHERIDAN KEENE."

This having been silently accomplished, Sheridan Keene concealed the missive in an inner pocket, buttoned his coat around him, and went to sleep.

It was seven o'clock when he finally awoke, and Reddy had been out and brought in an apology for a breakfast. Yet it served the purpose, for hungry men can enjoy even an apology if there is enough of it.

Keene found both of his companions more grim and morose than on the previous night, probably because they were sober. He now learned that they were from the West, and had been in Boston nearly a month, waiting for an opportunity to steal the Barton boy. They had occupied their present quarters only since the previous day, however. It was a temporary concealment, secured in case of emergency. Once Keene ventured to ask where Brackett had gone, and who had charge of the boy; but both questions were evasively answered, and he avoided a second attempt. About eight o'clock Dave Brackett came in, bringing another bottle of liquor, and the spirits of Varney soon began to revive. Brackett at once began to discuss the calling up of Barton on the telephone, and on learning that the first delivery of mail occurred about nine o'clock, it was decided to hasten the step at once, before Barton could leave home after receiving the letter.

To Keene's intense satisfaction, Brackett chose that he should accompany him, and they left the house together, departing by a rear door and gaining the street by access to a

narrow alley. Keene's bruise had much improved, and he now looked quite respectable.

A half-hour later they entered a public telephone station in a drug store more than a mile away. Brackett already had decided that he would do the talking, yet required that Keene should remain at his elbow, in case information was needed.

To all of this Detective Keene had signified grim and ready compliance, together with a vicious interest which Brackett evidently approved. But the detective had removed his secret missive to a side pocket of his reefer.

When in the company of a man instinctively apprehensive and alert, it is not easy to drop a letter undetected, and where it will reach reliable hands. Up to the time they entered the drug store Keene had found absolutely no safe opportunity. There, however, he was resolved the letter should be left. He entered behind Brackett, and observed that the clerk was a young man, then engaged in wiping the showcases. As they approached the telephone closet near a rear corner of the store, Keene glanced back over his shoulder and winked to the clerk, at the same time exposing an edge of the letter by drawing it slightly from his pocket.

The clerk saw that some indirect communication was wanted, but did not quite comprehend. He started to approach the detective, but Keene instantly followed Brackett into the narrow closet, and securely closed the door.

It required but a minute to ring up Calvin Barton, and being assured of his identity, Brackett startled him with this blunt announcement:

"I want just one word from you in answer to Jim's letter. What is it to be—yes or no?"

Barton was more than amazed, and at once began to open a discussion.

"Stop that," said Brackett, severely. "One word only—yes or no!"

"Give me till noon?"

"Now or never! At once!"

The answer came that Keene had expected. The only answer any father would have given, whether he had intended to comply with the demand or not.

"It's yes," whispered Brackett, triumphantly, instantly hanging up the instrument.

"I knew 'twould be," growled Keene, under his breath.

He drew aside to let Brackett pass out, then instantly followed him.

But he had left his letter to Chief Watts lying upon the walnut counter just below the telephone.

Brackett paid the clerk, not observing the rather perplexed expression on his youthful face, and immediately rejoined the detective, who had walked to the door, without further notice of the clerk, and they left the place and hastened away.

Less than half an hour later a young lady, whose haste and excitement indicated that she expected to talk with a gentleman friend, entered to use the telephone. Before doing it, however, she came out with a rush and gave the clerk the letter.

"Isn't that curious?" she demanded, with her feminine curiosity now predominating.

The clerk read the superscription, and instantly tumbled to the whole business.

"No; it's as clear as daylight," he replied, and hastening to the telephone he immediately called up Chief Inspector Watts.

"Have you a man by the name of Keene on your force?" he inquired.

"Yes," answered the chief, with immediate interest. "What about him?"

"A sealed letter has been left here, on the cover of which is a request signed by Keene asking that the letter should be hurried forward to you. Is this genuine or a hoax?"

"It's decidedly genuine," cried Chief Watts. "Send it to me at once by a messenger."

The clerk carried the letter to headquarters in person.

Half an hour later Chief Watts entered the Fairfield street residence of the Hon. Mr. Barton, whom he had wired to await his coming.

"You have news for me, chief?" asked Barton, eagerly.

"No," replied Chief Watts, "but you have news for me!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Barton, perplexed.

"Let me see the letter you received this morning, Mr. Barton?"

"What letter?" Barton had drawn back, turning pale.

Evidently the threatening missive had had the effect desired, and fear was driving the man to strict compliance with its demands, even to concealing the truth from the detectives.

"Don't beat about the bush with me, Mr. Barton," Chief Watts sternly answered, drawing up his imposing figure. "Your mail of this morning contained a letter from the abductors of your son. Let me see it!"

"I first demand to know——"

"The letter, Barton, or I'll throw up the case," interrupted Chief Watts, with much austerity.

He would have done nothing of the kind, but the threat had the effect intended. Barton immediately produced the letter Keene had dictated the night before, and placed it in the hand of Chief Watts.

The inspector read it twice and returned it.

"Do precisely what is commanded," he said, shortly.

"But how did you know of this letter?" cried Barton, with rising excitement. "I received it only half an hour ago, and——"

"And are thoroughly mystified," interposed Chief Watts, with a toss of his head. "Barton, don't be surprised because we detectives make curious discoveries. It's a part of our business. Do you remember the words with which I closed our interview yesterday morning?"

Barton's excited eyes were fairly riveted on the chief inspector's forceful face.

"You said," he cried, "that you'd have manacles on Dave Barton's wrists within ten days."

"And so I will," said Chief Watts, dryly. "You do what this letter commands, and leave the rest to me."

CHAPTER IX.

KEENE SPRINGS HIS TRAP.

"Three of us will be enough," declared Brackett, with mild emphasis. "There's no need of any more of us going, and we want

the extra seat in the team for stowing the money. No, Reddy, you're not to go?"

"Aye, three will be enough for sure," Bill Varney ventured to put in, by way of approval. "What the dickens use will we have for more'n three, I'd like to know. Me and Dave and Haggett."

"Besides, Reddy, there's other work for you to do," added Brackett, looking up at the doubtful face of the man opposite. "After we have gone, you must go and tell her to get the kid ready for safe delivery on our return. We'll do what we've agreed, so be it I get my own; and Cal Barton can have his yellow-headed little kid and welcome. That'll be your part to do, Reddy, and you must wait at the other house till we come around there with the stuff. Then I'll send you over to town with the kid, and let you leave him, always providing the stuff is in our hands. We'll not come back here again."

It was already after dark on that fateful Thursday, and the culmination of one of the boldest designs in the history of child-stealing was rapidly approaching. The three scoundrels were variously occupied in the room already described. Dave Brackett, whose eyes were brighter than usual, owing to the unusual amount of liquor he had taken, was cleaning a revolver at the table, an operation which Mr. Varney was surveying with interested gaze.

Sheridan Keene was seated moodily at one side of the room, tipped back in his chair, and apparently the least interested and the least concerned of all. He had noticed the pronoun used by Brackett when referring to the Barton boy's custodian, and he wondered who the woman might be.

He felt tolerably sure that this hovel in which they were seated, however, was now under the watchful eyes of one or more professional shadows from the police headquarters, and that the location and rescue of the stolen lad, and the apprehension of his custodian and the man called Reddy, would rapidly follow the latter's departure from the house that very evening.

"What time is it?" asked Brackett, who now had finished cleaning and reloading his revolver, and thrust the weapon into a hip-pocket.

"It must be near eight o'clock, surely," said Sheridan Keene, looking up and squarely meeting the man's inquiring eyes.

"So late as that," Brackett exclaimed, starting up. "Then it's time we were off. Go at once for the horse, Varney, and bring the team to the corner I mentioned."

"All right, Dave."

"And you, Reddy, start ahead of us and wait our return in the other house. Be off, now, both of you."

Varney quickly donned his coat and left the place in company with the other, and five minutes later Mr. Brackett signed for Sheridan Keene to follow after him. The oil lamp was extinguished, and together the two men descended the rear stairs and walked to the corner two blocks away.

There they were obliged to wait briefly for Varney, who drove up with a covered carriage hired from a neighboring stable.

"Get in," said Brackett, sternly. "Is the lantern there, Varney?"

"Yes, under the back seat."

Keene sprang into the carriage and took the seat beside Varney, in order to give him the necessary directions for reaching the rendezvous; while Brackett took the seat in the rear. Had he been sure that events would have worked thus, Keene could have planned to effect the arrest then and there. But the hazard of now attempting it alone and unaided was greater than that of delay.

"Go ahead, Varney," commanded Brackett, who appeared nervous and excited. "And drive fast till we are well out of the city."

Varney readily obeyed, and they were off on the final move of the design.

A half-hour later they were approaching the rendezvous, and Keene, who had been giving the directions from the start, said shortly:

"Pull up here, Bill."

"Pull up it is, Mr. Haggett."

"This will be a safe place to run the team under cover, and we can walk the rest of the way to the spot I have got in my mind."

Varney immediately drew down the horse, and all three men sprang down to the road.

"Not a bad location," said Brackett, approvingly.

He was right. For a half-mile the road was skirted by a dark woodland, in the obscurity of which were countless safe concealments for vehicles or men.

The direction from which they had come lay straight away, capped by an elevation over which no team carrying a lighted lantern could approach without being readily seen. The way beyond was lost in the darkness of the night, and not even a remote light indicated a human habitation.

"Get me the lantern, Varney, and then lead the horse into the woods," commanded Brackett. "Secure him to one of the trees with a half-hitch only, that can be easily broken away in case of need."

"Leave that to me, Davie," growled Varney, producing the lantern from under the seat and handing it to his confederate. "Do you think I will tie the horse up with a hangman's knot?"

To this retort Mr. Brackett made no reply, and Sheridan Keene waited with him by the side of the lonely road until Mr. Varney's operations had been completed.

The night was dark, with only a few stars discernable between moving banks of clouds. A light wind was blowing from the east, sighing with mournful sound through the branches of the trees, and giving an unusual chill to the damp night air. From some pond or bit of swamp land not far away there rose the dull, intermittent croaking of frogs, and the incessant whistle of young "pipers," inspiring a feeling of loneliness in the superlative degree.

"Yes, the locality is all right, Mr. Haggett," Brackett repeated, after a considerable interval of silence. "In less than another half-hour the work should be done."

"And well done, Brackett," rejoined Sheridan Keene, without the significance he felt inclined to give to the response.

He saw no sign of the men from headquarters, whom he had asked Chief Watts to send in the event of the latter receiving his letter; but he instinctively felt that they were somewhere in that neighborhood, and that the display of the lantern from any quarter would speedily bring them within immediate call, if indeed they were not there already.

At the end of three or four minutes, Varney returned from the woods and rejoined his companions. The team was now securely hidden from observation from the road, and the whole length of highway appeared to be deserted.

"This way, Brackett," said Keene, with a wave of his hand.

The others followed him without a word, skirting the side of the road for two hundred yards or more, when they arrived at a spot admirably suited to their design, as well as to the design of Sheridan Keene. The slope of the ground enabled the lantern to be seen for a little distance in either direction, while back from the road was a denser growth of woods, offering an admirable hiding place for them—or for others.

Brackett surveyed the entire prospect with critical eyes, and finally observed:

"It is all right, Haggett, I think."

"I thought it would be to your fancy, Brackett. I remember the place from the time I used to work in the cemetery, which lies a piece over yonder."

"Sort o' grave employment, wa'n't it, Haggett," inquired Varney, with a grin; but Keene vouchsafed no answer.

"Can we sight the top of the hill from here, over which we came?" demanded Brackett.

"D'ye see, sir? The road's almost as straight as an arrow."

"This'll do, then. Take off your coat, Varney, and mask the lantern after I get it lighted."

Varney instantly stripped off his coat, and held it around the lantern, which Brackett had set upon the ground. The latter produced a match from his vest pocket, and, stooping down, succeeded in igniting the wick. In a moment a glow of pale light fell on his dark and vengeful countenance, throwing it into sudden and startling relief. It

was the face of a man who now fully believed that the moment of evil triumph was near at hand.

Before the match with which the lantern had been lighted had fairly expired, a quick, half-suppressed cry broke from Mr. Varney.

"Look, look, Dave! By heaven, he's coming!"

Brackett started to his feet like a flash, and stared in the direction indicated.

Far away over the road by which they had come, yet on a plane much higher than that they now occupied, was the steady gleam of a red light, like a crimson star close upon the horizon.

"You're right!" cried Dave, excitedly. "Get under cover, in the woods yonder! Don't separate! Leave me to place the lantern where I want it."

Accompanied by Varney, Sheridan Keene hurriedly sought the gloom of the adjacent woods, and the place where the shrubbery was thickest. When he looked back, Brackett also was hurriedly approaching among the trees, and the signal lantern was burning brightly within a few yards of the side of the road.

"Lay low!" commanded Brackett, whose voice was tremulous despite himself. "Don't make a sound, no matter what happens."

For five minutes the three men crouched amid the shrubbery and waited, in utter silence; then the sound of an approaching vehicle came to their ears.

In a moment more the red lantern came suddenly into full view, and in outline darker than the darkness the vehicle itself. It was a top-buggy, and the driver suddenly drew down his horse directly opposite the lantern Brackett had placed by the roadside.

Then he sprang down and deliberately turned the horse off a little. For a minute the man was engaged in lifting two heavy sacks from the bottom of the buggy and

transferring them to the side of the road. Then he paused for a moment, and looked about in all directions; then he turned the team completely around, and, remounting to his seat, drove rapidly back the way he had come.

Bill Varney was breathing deep and hard, and appeared impatient to rush down to the road.

"Hold on a bit," commanded Keene, forcibly detaining him by the arm. "First make sure there is no one about here who might have observed him."

The detective was aiming to give any officer within view of the lighted lantern an opportunity to approach sufficiently near to respond immediately to his call.

"Come, now!" cried Brackett, at the end of three or four minutes. "I'll not leave the lantern burning there any longer, nor the money lying beside it, if money it is."

They ran down to the edge of the road together, Brackett in advance. On returning to the spot, the two canvas sacks left there by Calvin Barton instantly met his eager gaze. He gave one a violent kick, and the clink of coin instantly answered the blow.

"We have it! We have it!" he cried, with an exultant oath. "By God, Haggett, your letter brought him to his knees! The team, Varney—the team! Go get the team!"

"Hold on a bit, Mr. Varney," cried Sheridan Keene.

Varney turned back like a flash.

Keene had moved to one side a step or two, till the lantern was between him and the other men, and the light therefrom fell full upon them.

"What's the matter, Haggett, that you speak like that?" cried Brackett, angrily. "Do you mean——"

Then he clipped his question with a frightful gasp.

Sheridan Keene had whipped out a brace

of revolvers, and both men were now covered with the threatening weapons.

"It means," he thundered, sternly, "that you both are under arrest! Up with your hands, or I'll fire! Both of you! Hello! hello! inspectors of police!"

The vociferous cry scarce was needed.

From the darkness of the woods on the opposite side of the road a half-dozen men were rapidly approaching, like shadows uprisen from the ground.

CHAPTER X.

CONCLUSION.

The impotent bitterness and rage of both Dave Brackett and William Varney on finding themselves arrested at the very moment their triumph had seemed most certain can better be imagined than described.

Nor were these feelings a whit ameliorated when it fairly dawned upon them that Sheridan Keene was in reality an inspector of police, and that chiefly by his almost phenomenal sagacity had been wrought their capture and downfall.

But the men into whose hands they now had fallen were accustomed to and took little notice of such sentiments as these. Despite curses, oaths and vituperation, both prisoners were started off for the tombs; while Sheridan Keene, with the help of an assistant, loaded the sacks of money into Varney's team and returned with it to town.

Meantime Chief Inspector Watts had not been idle.

When Reddy left the house earlier that evening he had been shadowed by the chief and one of his subordinate inspectors, and seen to enter another dwelling about a half-mile away.

Chief Watts did not delay for a search-warrant. Waiting until his companion had procured the help of two of the Cambridge police, whom he stationed at the front and

rear of the house to prevent escape, Chief Watts personally entered the dwelling with his inspector and speedily accomplished his mission.

The house contained only three persons. One was the man called Reddy; another a woman, whose identity was not then suspected.

The third person was the Barton boy, alive and well, despite his confinement. The joy of the lad on finding himself rescued could hardly be described. Within an hour from that time he was restored to his father's arms.

With the arrest and conviction of the entire gang, the whole truth became known, though parts of the same were at that time kept from the public.

Dave Brackett proved, indeed, to be the step-brother of the man he had aimed to wrong, and who went even so far as to plead that his sentence might be made as light as possible. The plea proved vain, however, and the whole gang went to prison on long terms.

The woman in whose charge the Barton boy had been found was none other than the divorced wife of the elder Barton. The man with whom she had fled West years before had long been dead. Subsequently coming in contact with her recreant son, the two, on learning of Calvin Barton's great wealth, had come East again to execute the infamous scheme depicted.

How it would have terminated but for the sagacity and courage of Detective Sheridan Keene must forever remain in the field of conjecture.

THE END.

The title of the story to appear in next week's SHIELD WEEKLY (No. 9) is, "A Double Play; or, Two Mysteries in One Net." As can be seen from the story in this number, no more interesting detective tales have ever been written than those now appearing in SHIELD WEEKLY. Read next week's story. It's great.

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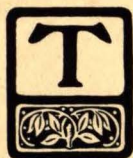
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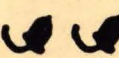
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